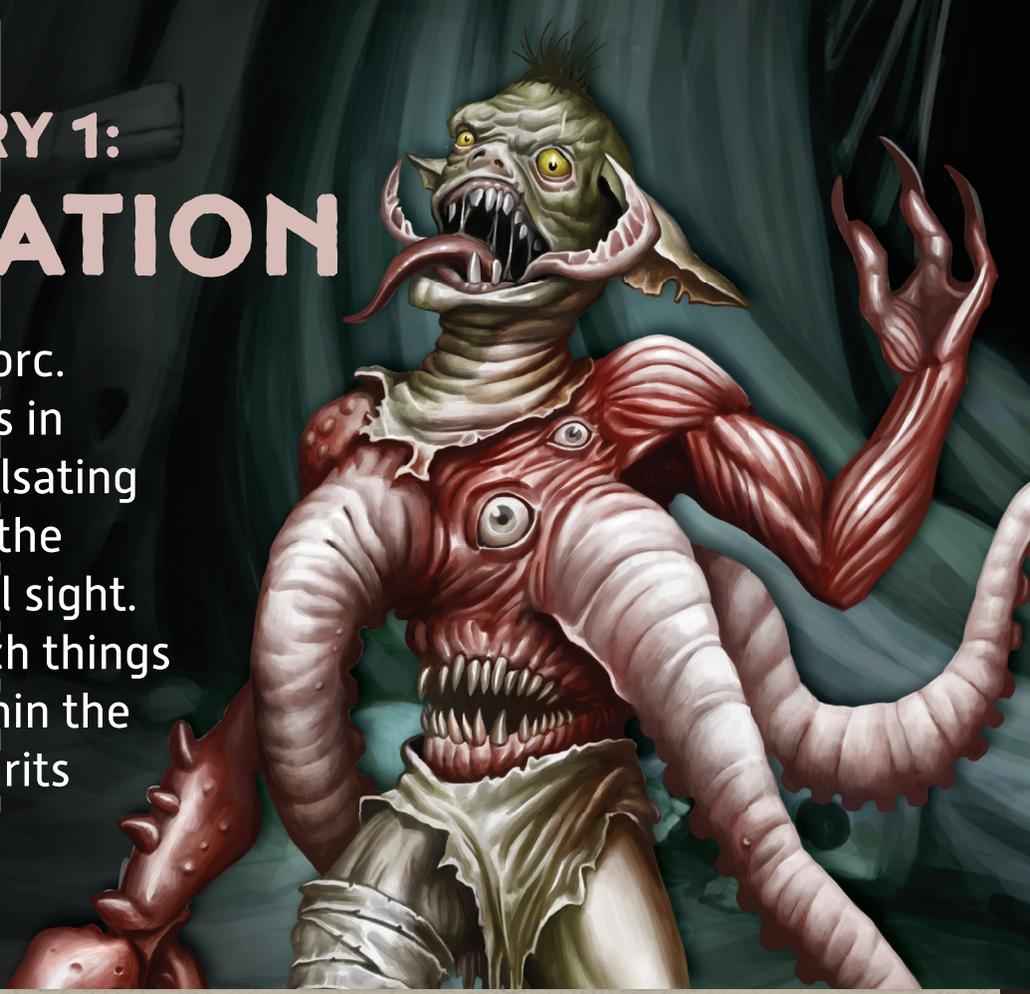


MONSTER STORY 1: ABOMINATION

The glow surprised the orc. He was used to darkness in these tunnels, so the pulsating purple emanating from the crevasse was an unusual sight. The shamans told of such things that could be found within the caverns and how the spirits insisted on reclaiming such relics.



He dug hard, trying to break the glowing shard away from the rocks trapping it. He was amazed by how much he wanted it. There was a loud, unpleasant snap of a breaking finger but he didn't care.

He thought briefly of sharing his find, but it was far too important. The others wouldn't understand, would try to take it away. It was safe in his hut, away from the prying eyes. He liked the glow, he liked the way the jagged edges of the shard felt to the touch, as if his fingers felt pierced by tiny needles. He thought it spoke to him. It filled his dreams with visions of victories and of towering might, of shamans of the tribe in awe of his worth and cowering beneath his ferocity.

He felt invigorated, making savage kills during the hunts, his new potential filling him, overflowing, struggling to break free. The scales appeared first, on the back of his arm, then spreading to his back. The finger he broke liberating the stone went limp and morphed into a strange tentacle. He hid the changes but the withered shaman noticed.

The exile was full of shame and pain. The cretins were banishing him, the best among them, the one meant to surpass them all. His tentacle dragged behind him as he limped away from the tribeland, his hoof making a clicking sound on cavern floor.

Only pain filled his days now. Pain of rejection, pain of isolation, pain of his body morphing into a broken, tormented mass of misshapen forms. At least the shard was there to share the agony and bring a measure of solace. He used it to carve symbols into his flesh so that he would remember his body before it would take yet another shape, in a new flash of blinding pain.

He no longer remembered what he was, as the torment consumed him. Stumbling in the dark, coughing curses and threats, the pain was the only thing left. Then, down the tunnel, he heard wary steps – steps that did not belong in these caverns. His mangled mouth broke into a bloody grin. The pain would not be his alone for long. He would share.